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*The Relevance of Deep Ecology
to the Third World* (1990)
Some Preliminary Comments

INTRODUCTION

THE APPEARANCE IN *ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS* of work by Third World environmentalists is to be welcomed, and should be greatly encouraged. If the movements for environmental protection anywhere in the world are to be relevant, they must address issues within the global framework. This can only be done in conjunction with and by engaging other movements around the globe. Only through the genuine amalgamation of the various and specific historical experiences can we move toward a new direction(s) for human society. Ramachandra Guha's "sympathetic critique" of deep ecology is an important step and a good example of the necessity of such exchanges, for he raises several issues concerning the tenets of deep ecology that are most easily visible from outside the Western industrial world.¹

In this paper, I comment on two of these issues: wilderness preservation and the usefulness of the anthropocentric/biocentric distinction.

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WILDERNESS: ORIGINS AND VALUES

Guha criticizes deep ecology for equating environmental protection with wilderness preservation. This flaw, he argues, is due to deep ecology's lack of awareness of its historical roots and limitations. Adherence to this position, he goes on to argue, actually obscures the real sources of environmental degradation and thus helps to perpetuate the existing order. Moreover, deep ecology fails to recognize the impact of its commitment to wilderness in the Third World. I discuss each of these in turn.

Deep ecology is obviously rooted in the culture of those who espouse it; this is the case of every movement. The very process of transcendence or dialectical working out, moreover, assumes a history; nevertheless, simply pointing out the origins of a particular historical experience does not invalidate it. There is no question that the circumstances of development in the United States—including the pattern of settlement over the huge geographical area available—have helped to shape the response to environmental degradation, e.g., an emphasis on wilderness preservation. There is also little question that in many respects the existence of wilderness may "fit in" with the cultural categories of a consumer society; as a retreat from the insanity of (sub)urban-industrial life—an alternative that only a country like the U.S. can afford, inheriting as it did a virtually unexploited continent still underpopulated compared to the rest of the world, and living off wealth extracted throughout the world.

To the contrary, however, while there may be some cultural fit between wilderness and the existing order that results from the particular experience of material development in the U.S., in most respects it does not "fit." From the very beginning and increasingly so the wilderness system, wildlife refuges, and old-growth forests are under fierce attacks by those who say we cannot afford them because they undermine the viability of an economy based on endless growth.

The real issues are whether Guha's claim that environmental protection means protection of wilderness is an accurate description of deep ecology and whether such a position is wrongheaded in substance. Related to these issues is a larger question: how should humans interact with the rest of the biosphere, and must wilderness preservation stand in opposition to an approach that integrates human livelihood and environmental protection?

I believe that Guha is partly wrong in stating that deep ecology equates environmental protection with wilderness protection and simply wrong in calling wilderness protection untenable or incorrect as a global strategy for environmental protection. The deep ecological support for wilderness is predicated upon two important fact/values: (1) that the Earth can support a limited amount of biomass and the more of it that is composed of humans or turned to human use, the less is available for other life, and (2) that humans do not have the right to so alter the composition of the biomass that there is a resulting destruction, in Leopold's words, of "the integrity, stability and beauty" of the ecosystem. The basis for these values may lie in the experience of Self-realization or through identification with nature as the real community of which one is a part. Whether it is called a transcendence of alienation in its various forms or the healing of a crippled heart, it is supposed to support the claim that human life is no more valuable than any other form of life, life being broadly construed to include plants, animals, ecosystems, rivers, mountains, and the Earth.

Associated with this understanding of the human/Earth relationship is a recognition that in much of the world almost any human impact is destructive of the biosphere. In many ecosystems human livelihood—beyond very minimal numbers and very limited technology—is simply not compatible with maintaining the integrity of the biosphere. Such situations are most obvious when one looks at the fate of other large mammals. Ecosystems must normally be healthy to support them. Their disappearance is a good indication of degradation. Grizzly bears, orangutans, tigers, elephants, and many other species cannot easily coexist with humans in any numbers or with very exploitative technologies. Many ecosystems, moreover, cannot easily accommodate significant human presence without serious deterioration in diversity and balance. Recognition of other species, of ecosystems, and the Earth as valuable in and of themselves, individually or collectively, apart from their usefulness to humans, means that in practice much of the Earth cannot be used for permanent human settlement. Existing devastation, the ever increasing spread of humans into new areas, and the nature of those human incursions, makes the task of protection of areas still in their natural state ever more urgent. Returning large areas to wilderness is only slightly less urgent.

LIVELIHOOD AND WILDERNESS

While preservation of wilderness may seem to be the overriding focus of deep ecology given the ever accelerating destruction of species, ecosystems, and possibly the planet itself, there is a profound recognition that humans have their place *in* nature as well. With regard to places where it is appropriate for humans to settle, how to combine livelihood with environmental integrity is a major emphasis and how to move toward the reestablishment of a real community, embedded in the local ecosystem is a priority of the deep ecology movement. While it may be a valid criticism that much of the thinking in this area is fuzzy, naive, or falls victim to mystification, it is not true that wilderness is the single goal of deep ecologists. Given the human-nature relationship that deep ecology espouses—that to be effective in allowing nature to heal itself, one must also heal one's own self and community—it seems odd to suggest that deep ecology is unconcerned with human communities and their place in nature.²

SOURCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Another criticism that Guha makes of deep ecology is that the focus on humans in general as the problem obscures the real causes of environmental degradation, namely overconsumption and militarization. Although his criticism has much merit, I believe he overstates the case. There can be no doubt that in explaining the particular developments that have resulted in so much destruction over the past two to three hundred years, industrialization, imperialism, overconsumption in the developed world, and the huge commitment of resources to armaments, are paramount. Guha is correct when he says that many in the movement see the problem as simply too many people behaving stupidly, without any regard for the nature of the system in which they live, its dynamics, and the fact that it victimizes most people as well as nature. Because it is probably true that most people who are victimizing nature are themselves victims of the social order, he is right in suggesting that the obstacles to significant changes in the relationship to nature are structural, not simply a matter of altering one's world view.

Yet, for every bit of evidence that this criticism is valid, there is evidence that it is only partially valid. Deep ecology and the German Greens do not

see things as differently as Guha suggests. Indeed, I believe the Green movement in Germany and in particular Bahro have informed the deep ecology movement in the U.S.³ There is a widespread recognition within deep ecology of the great inequality that exists in the world with regard to consumption, great differences in the existing power of various groups to shape a society's relationship with nature, and a recognition that the solution to ecological problems must address the issues of class, gender, and ethnicity. In addition, there is a recognition that all forms of domination are linked, as evidenced by the ongoing debates between deep ecology and social ecology, between deep ecology and ecofeminism, and between deep ecology and Marxism and other socialisms.

The nature of these linkages is certainly not settled; nonetheless, deep ecology may be distinctive in believing that the resolution of equity issues among humans will not automatically result in an end to the human destruction of the biosphere. One can envision, depending upon the theoretical version chosen, a society without class distinctions, without patriarchy, and with cultural autonomy that still attempts to control or manage the rest of nature in a utilitarian fashion that results in the deterioration of the biosphere. Such social changes would probably lessen the destructiveness of the relationship for two reasons: much of the technology of the last three hundred years is incompatible with a truly egalitarian society and much of the alienation that distorts the expression of human energy into schemes of control would not exist. Thus, it can be argued that although a significant change in the way humans relate to each other is a necessary component in a changed relationship to nature, it is not sufficient to bring about, by itself, the recognition and inclusion of nature as part of the moral community.

Deep ecologists point out, correctly I believe, that in terms of the integrity of an ecosystem, it makes little difference if an old-growth forest and its inhabitants are destroyed to build one house for a North American or fifty simple structures in the Third World. From a strictly human standpoint the latter is much more justifiable than the former. Nevertheless, even if North Americans were to sharply restrict their consumption, the fact remains that it is human numbers as well as levels of consumption that count.⁴ There is, I believe, widespread agreement among Greens and deep ecologists that fewer humans (and especially less extensive occupation of the globe) as well as equitable and drastically curtailed consumption are essential to restoring the balance of the planet.

Guha does have much to tell us about the situation in the Third World and the problems of wilderness preservation there. While those of us engaged in political activity in North America are used to confronting the issue of jobs versus environment, it is important to understand that in the Third World "jobs" often equates with actual survival. While sparing old growth in the U.S. within the existing economic structure may cause hardship, sparing tropical forests within the existing economic structure may mean immediate hunger. (However, clearing tropical forests may mean eventual hunger as well, depending on the quality of the land cleared.) What Guha is telling us is that efforts to protect the environment by establishing wilderness areas in the Third World hurt the poorest of the poor—they are just more examples of imperialism, the same imperialism that pushes the poor and others into the wilderness in the first place.

The alternative, Guha suggests, is to recognize that wilderness is not appropriate; instead, one must integrate livelihood with environmental protection. Certainly this is the preferred path, when one is discussing how humans should interact with the rest of nature in areas appropriate for human settlement, but it does not address the needs of other species (such as elephants and tigers)—those that cannot coexist in the same area with all but the fewest humans living very simply—or the fact that the integrity of many ecosystems is negatively impacted by the settlement of any humans, even those living at subsistence levels. It is the sheer extensiveness of human settlement in much of Asia (and Europe, and parts of Africa and North America) that is a problem. Humans compete for habitat with other species, threaten their destruction, and otherwise degrade the environment, even diminishing its human carrying capacity.

Wilderness is needed in the Third World as much as it is in Europe and other long settled parts of the globe; nevertheless, it is also important to realize that the structure of imperialism makes the manner in which wilderness is created/protected in the Third World often unjust from a human standpoint. This fact desperately needs to be taken into account by environmentalists. How? First, by understanding how imperialism has created and continues to feed much of the dynamic that threatens ecosystems and species in the Third World from the Amazon to Malaysia; by understanding how countries that have broken or are attempting to break with their historical place in the existing structure in an effort to survive find them-

selves adopting economic strategies that are environmentally destructive; and by understanding how the wealth extracted from the Third World makes possible the culture of consumption in the First World.⁵

Second, based upon the understanding just set out, we must come to terms with the severe limits of what can be achieved to protect the environment within the framework of a system based on endless material growth and extreme socioeconomic inequality. We need to grasp the necessity of moving beyond the choices offered by the powers that be; only by pushing beyond the limits of what is acceptable to the existing political-economic order can constraints on ecological-political choices be transcended.

Finally, we must recognize that we cannot alter the existing biocidal order without broad-based support. Only if our thinking and feeling is informed by an understanding of human social relations can we develop successful strategies for protecting the Earth and its diversity. If we are to move beyond the existing order we need to understand who our potential allies are, as well as what the obstacles are. If we treat the poor—who go to the rain forest to farm because they have been driven off the land they formerly cultivated by the wealthy who can make higher profits producing cash crops for the international market—as the problem, rather than the system which constrains their choices, we will fail. If we do not forge alliances with those who oppose the existing order—albeit on the basis of its injury to the poor, to women, to oppressed ethnic groups—we will also fail. The work of EPOCA in Nicaraguan reforestation efforts and in Central America generally and the Greenpeace campaign directed at the IMF and the World Bank are both examples of environmental action that reflect at least some elements of what is necessary. Making common cause where possible in pushing for reform and ultimately transformation is essential.

In the short term—given the continued existence of an international political economic system committed to growth and great inequality, and given an international state system in which those who would resist such domination adapt to it to survive—how do we resolve conflicts between particular groups of humans, often the most oppressed, and other species? Even if deep ecologists and other advocates of wilderness creation and protection do attempt to ensure that such activities are not taken at the expense of the oppressed, they will not always be able to achieve both ends: protecting the environment and the poor. By what method do we choose what

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is to be done? There is no getting around these uncomfortable questions, and previous attempts to address them, including Naess's notion of "near and vital," are not adequately developed.⁶

ANTHROPOCENTRIC/BIOCENTRIC DISTINCTION

In attempting to sort out the questions raised in the previous section the biocentric/anthropocentric distinction is critical. If nature and nonhuman life are held by humans to be as valuable as human life, different answers and courses of action certainly follow than if one only regards human life and needs as valuable. Nonetheless, Guha argues that this distinction has little meaning when it comes to addressing two of the major problems undermining the health of the planet: overconsumption and militarization. I argue to the contrary that significantly different practical consequences follow from adherence to a biocentric rather than an anthropocentric system of values: a biocentric world view constrains human activity much more significantly and distinctly than even the most self-enlightened anthropocentric view. Moreover, a biocentric critique of overconsumption and militarization fully takes account of the underlying dynamic which produces these problems. Initially, a few words need to be said concerning the meaning of anthropocentrism.

Guha suggests that the existing social order in the West is not truly anthropocentric in the sense that it does not value and benefit humans *per se*, but only some humans, e.g., political and economic elites. Humans who do not fit into these categories are often treated much the way other species are—they are valuable only insofar as they are useful to those at the top of the social hierarchy. Such an analysis is certainly accurate; nevertheless, in contrast to the various forms of domination that are salient features of society, the stated values of the elites are in content anthropocentric: all humans have equal dignity and value. Thus, a social system which benefits the few is justified by arguing that it benefits most or all. Certainly no other justification would do in this age. The contradiction between myth and behavior, however, is most apparent when we look at those who have become superfluous as either producers or consumers: they are "other," objects to be managed by welfare or simply repressed. Widespread toleration of this gap between values and behavior exists for a variety of reasons that we cannot go into here.

Are such systems *anthropocentric*, as deep ecologists argue, or are they better characterized by another term such as *patriarchy* or *class society*? Calling such societies *anthropocentric* seems to miss the fact that only some humans have value (in practice, dominant myths notwithstanding), that control over the human relationship with nature is not shared equally by all, and that the fruits of the exploitation of nature are not shared equally. Yet terms such as *patriarchy* or *class society* seem to ignore the degradation of nonhuman life and the Earth that is so fundamental in almost all existing human societies—and the way in which most humans, regardless of social position, participate in that degradation.⁷ Even where critics of the dominant social order recognize the fundamental importance of the human relationship with nature, they continue to share many of the assumptions of the order they criticize: for example, faith in human reason and its ability to solve all problems and the centrality of humans in the universe. Even the phrase “relationship with nature” itself suggests something very different than “place within nature.”

My purpose here is not to resolve the issue, but to point out the need for clarification when using these terms as well as the importance of the distinction between values as a world view and as actual behavior. In the discussion that follows, anthropocentrism is used to denote any ideology or system of values which is human centered.⁸ Such a definition for the purposes of this paper is not meant to slight the reality of the social systems in which these values are embedded—systems which in practice have yet to come anywhere close to living up to their avowed norms. Nor does such a definition imply that the very real and significant differences among human-centered systems of values are unimportant.

OVERCONSUMPTION

In what ways then is a biocentric system of values meaningful in dealing with overconsumption and militarization? Let's consider overconsumption first. The very meaning of overconsumption differs depending upon whether one takes a biocentric or anthropocentric view. A biocentric view, by giving moral considerability to other species and ecosystems, much more sharply limits human consumption—not only as individuals or groups, but as a species, i.e., it implies a limit on human numbers—than

an anthropocentric view which sees value in nature only insofar as it is useful to humans.

If nonhuman nature is valued for itself, if the integrity of the biosphere as a community is valued for itself, then human consumption which disrupts it is wrong: it would constitute overconsumption. Most modern forms of agriculture, forestry, mining, energy extraction and use, housing, transportation, and the like are part of a system of biocidal carnage, and therefore can clearly be called overconsumption.

In a human-centered system of values, overconsumption is primarily seen as a social relationship, a problem of distribution between wealthy and poor, a problem of economic ownership.⁹ Overconsumption occurs when some consume more than they need at the expense of those who do not have what they need. Generally speaking, material growth and rising levels of consumption are equated with quality of life; the poor can become better off through economic growth and/or more egalitarian distribution. To this end technology and social organization need to be applied. Such a view does not admit to any finite limit on consumption; nor does it recognize injury to the biosphere as a factor except insofar as it may affect the continued use of the biosphere for human benefit.

Even with most forms of weak anthropocentrism—a view that is sensitive to long-range sustainability—we are still left with a system of values which can and does justify monoculture, high use of energy, massive reclamation projects, conversion of self-regulating ecosystems into cities, and suburbs and agricultural land managed for human use. Such a system continues to view nature as primarily a resource (or a nuisance) and only places limits on consumption which do not affect the sustainability of exploitation. The conversion for human benefit of vast portions of the biosphere is not viewed as wrong even though countless other species are reduced to minimal numbers or to extinction, and ecosystems impoverished or destroyed. Moreover, faith in the centrality of human abilities, particularly as expressed through technology, makes the constraints imposed by concerns for sustainability so vague as to be ineffective as limits on consumption. In contrast, constraints imposed by regarding the ecosystem and other species as valuable in and of themselves narrow the range of appropriate human behavior very sharply: if it injures the biosphere, don't do it.

The distinction between the two views goes much deeper when we ex-

amine the roots and social function of high levels of consumption. On a psychological level much consumption is a result of alienation, not just from nature, but also from self (nature within). Endless accumulation and the distractions it offers are essential features of developed societies and of the elites and middle classes elsewhere in the world. Such pathetic attempts to substitute possession of things in lieu of empowerment, sense of place, and authentic relationships is never satisfactory. A hunger for more always remains.¹⁰ On a social level consumption is used by elites to manage large segments of the population. Give people enough stuff and they will forget their pain and powerlessness. The poor make do with the promise of some adequate level of consumption in the distant future and in the meantime they turn to other forms of distraction, often drugs.

Dominant Western or liberal capitalist views tend to deny that there is such a thing as overconsumption. To liberalism, high levels of consumption are viewed as a true measure of the success of our civilization and the individuals within it. It represents the triumph of control and technique, of humans over nature, the fullest flowering of our human faculties. It embraces dualism, hierarchy, atomism, all the machinery of control; nature is fodder, the "other," something to be mastered and managed. Man (intentionally masculine) is the centerpiece of the universe.

There are many human-centered theories which do recognize the pathological roots and role high levels of consumption play in many societies. The Marxisms of Reich, Marcuse, Gorz, and others are concerned with how factors such as consumption are both the result of and further feed alienation. Nevertheless, most Marxism remains wedded to some kind of control over nature, and thus embraces dualism as well as open-ended material growth through progress in technology and social organization.¹¹ It espouses an unlimited faith in human intelligence and rationality, the ability to understand, control, shape, and improve upon not just human social organization, but all of nature. It is assumed that the evolution of human consciousness will keep pace with any problems, and that we will learn to guide cultural evolution. On the plus side, however, Marxism does reject the view of the world as essentially atomized. As Ollman has so ably demonstrated, Marx saw things as constituted by their relationship and the field of relationships.¹² One can neither change nature without changing oneself nor change an element in a system without changing the

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system. Despite the limitations of Marxism, a profoundly ecological sort of truth is recognized in such a perspective.

Much radical feminist theory rejects all institutionalized hierarchy and control as being inimical to authenticity.¹³ The social problem is not so much who has power, but the power or domination itself. Relationships and community are essential values in this understanding. Both feminists and those concerned with domination based on ethnic differences have been central in pointing out how the category of "the other" runs throughout civilization, justifying oppression, exploitation, and cruelty toward anything that falls within it.¹⁴

Although there are several anthropocentric world views which object to Cartesian dualism, liberal atomism, and so on, nature and other species remain excluded from the community either explicitly or by silence. One is left with the gulf between humanity and nature, spirit and body, and with an ungrounded faith in the human mission to make over the planet in its own image.

Some anarchist, Marxist, and feminist theory does suggest that part of realizing one's fullest humanity, i.e., part of the process of transcending alienation, involves embracing one's place in nature. In other words, non-alienated being requires a biocentric view of some sort. In such cases being a "citizen rather than conqueror" is biocentric if the natural as well as the human community is recognized as valuable; however, if one simply values the human interest in non-alienation, then the dualism—and the anthropocentrism—remains and serves as a theoretical foundation for views which rationalize structures of control.

A biocentric view rejects both the enlightenment values which justify the social order that thrives on overconsumption as well as the various forms of faith and dualism which underlie world views critical of much of the existing order. This is not to say that much or even most of feminist, anarchist, or other critical social theory is fundamentally incompatible with biocentrism; nevertheless, where such theory continues to accept the human species as the centerpiece of evolution, with the rest of nature existing solely for humanity's use, it fails to address a central form of domination. As such, even under such critical value systems the biosphere is open to suffer the consequences of the arrogance implied in human attempts to manage nature. If species hierarchy is justified, then hierarchy

is justified. Much of what such critiques abhor follows from a human-centered view.

Biocentrism draws a clear line. To reject the human/nature dualism is to reject the "triumph" of the enlightenment attempt to control nature. It is to reject the triumph of knowledge and technique and analysis over Earth wisdom, understanding, and connectedness. It is to reject the focus on things rather than relationships. By rejecting these and valuing nature in and of itself, a biocentric view limits human consumption more fundamentally than any anthropocentric view can; it does so by thoroughly rejecting the roots of such consumption. In its place biocentrism values the web of life, as well as its parts, of which we are one.

MILITARIZATION

As with overconsumption we should ask which system of values will constrain militarism more: the human- or the biosphere-centered? By recognizing the valuableness of nature and other species apart from their usefulness to humans, a significant constraint is imposed on human activity with regard to both the conduct of war and more importantly the economic activity that is essential to preparation for war. Indeed, more than war itself, it is the consumption of "resources" to create and maintain the industrial capacity geared to arms production—for whatever purpose—that is so destructive of the biosphere. All human centered value systems necessarily fall prey to the easy rationalization of militarism.

If one is concerned only with humans, with the perpetuation and protection of particular social systems against internal or external threats, the constraints placed upon the consumption of nature are weak indeed. Even when limits on resources may temper overconsumption generally, there is a real tendency in this sphere of "national security" to literally let the future take care of itself and commit all to the current struggle. Certainly aesthetic regard for nature falls by the wayside. If the machine needs oil, then drill. The Soviet Union, as an example, has some of the strictest environmental legislation in the world. These laws also provide a giant loophole for any endeavor related to the security of the state, virtually negating restrictions.¹⁵ Most countries start with weaker laws to begin with before embracing the exceptions.

There are many human-centered value systems, religious and secular,

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critical of militarization—and all are largely ineffective. The failure comes in part from the wedding of values to structures of power—be they church or state—that depend upon force for their survival. Insofar as these pacifistic values are taken up by those "outside" these structures they provide some check. But because they are human-centered—the point of opposing militarization is to end human waste and suffering—it is easy to neutralize them by appeal to other human values and to other forms of suffering even worse than war or the costs of deterrence. The other great weakness is that much pacifistic thinking does not address adequately the roots of militarism, something I attempt to do below.

If one values nature in and for itself, then human goals and needs are placed within the context of a larger community. The value placed on the integrity of that community militates heavily against any human-centered rationalization for exploitation. A biocentric view quite simply limits the conversion of ecosystems and biomass to human use to any extensive degree. Although such a view may seem utopian, because it poses a threat to the survival of particular social systems or the system of historical social systems, it does not pose a threat to the survival of the species as some would argue. Quite the opposite, the threat to both us and the planet comes from this system of systems. It is here that biocentrism provides understanding which human-centered approaches cannot, for the latter accept fundamental values which justify the very structures that give rise to the outcomes they criticize.

Consider the roots of militarism. Because modern militarism is particularly virulent, attempts to understand and criticize this blight are often limited to the modern period. Certainly the combination of enlightenment arrogance, science, and technology, embedded in the international political economy resulting from the European expansion, has produced a very dangerous world.¹⁶ It is, however, necessary to look more deeply into human history to grasp the underlying dynamic of militarism. While it may have reached new proportions, it is not new, but rather an essential feature of something very old: civilization.¹⁷ It is inseparable from social systems based upon hierarchy (class, gender, and ethnic), control of nature, the denial of self, and the emotions and bonds which constitute the self. It is an essential feature of those societies in which the state exists, the process by which the state attempts to substitute itself for authentic human community is well underway, and conflict between communities has been replaced

by the institutionalized conflict of center and periphery and between competing centers.¹⁸ Civilization, and the process of its formation and emergence in the neolithic, is the story of the human attempt to adapt through various strategies of control—control of nature and of people through technology and social organization. It is this attempt to control nature that separates us from it, that constitutes the core of our alienation from life, and that becomes the foundation for social development that includes patriarchy, class domination, statism, and militarism.

While most, but by no means all human-centered *value* systems eschew militarism, civilization is held as a crowning achievement. Some value systems praise the military spirit, while the majority that condemn it usually do so as a necessary evil, i.e., they simultaneously justify it to one degree or another. The point to be made here is that civilization is based upon and is constituted by relationships of domination that invariably and necessarily produce the conflict and inequality which make militarism inevitable. Certainly some human-centered theory recognizes aspects of the roots of militarism, and it recognizes the terrible price humans have paid, even if ignoring the price nature has paid. Nevertheless, critics maintain a fervent faith in the human mission to manage, in the human ability to disentangle what is inextricably linked. They speak from within the perspective of civilization and cannot see that they must transcend the precarious ground on which they (we) teeter.¹⁹

Critical theory shares much in common with liberal theory in this area. Some Marxist analysis of the genesis of modern militarism is sound. The notion that many human ills would be solved with the end of class society is also appealing. But the end of class is not the end of the state or of domination, and hence not the end of social systems which produce militarism. (Nor is the end of capitalism the end of class.) The control of nature and the human control of social and cultural evolution are values deeply embedded in most Marxism. Although it has developed useful models for understanding social transformation, the assumptions, perspective, and the content of the transformative vision are very much within the human-centered tradition that is part of the problem.²⁰

Some feminism gets much closer to the source of the problem in its critique of hierarchy generally and in particular in its understanding of the central role of patriarchy to militarism and to producing humans amenable to domination. At times, however, feminist theory falls into a kind of

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intraspecific dualism, i.e., human males are the problem (while at the same time claiming credit for the fact that females created agriculture, which became the economic foundation for the emergence of hierarchy), ignoring that systems adapt to and alter the environment, and individuals adapt to (even while they resist) the roles created by the system's division of labor.²¹ Even where this dualism is not at issue, most feminism, like Marxism, remains human-centered. Values such as community, spontaneity, and integration of emotion and intellect militate against the worst features of mainstream human-centered values, but still fail to take account of the relationship with nature as fundamental to all hierarchical systems. Or they remain anthropocentric and fail to address the separation from nature which not only makes possible the superexploitation of the biosphere for the maintenance of the military apparatus, but also underlies the social structures which produce militarism.

While Marxism, feminism, and other critical social theory have contributed much to understanding the dynamic of our civilization, they tend to miss the point that if nonhuman life is not valued for itself, then life is not valued for itself. Any system of values that does not transcend nature-as-other cannot limit destruction of the biosphere as effectively as one that embraces nonhuman life as intrinsically valuable. Nor can such a value system help to heal the fundamental split in the human psyche which makes possible civilization and militarism.

Biocentrism is not alone in grasping that the dynamic of human evolution over the last six or seven thousand years may be at a dead end. Certainly the huge growth in human numbers, the displacement of "simpler" societies by more "complex" ones, ones with greater capacity to exploit nature, capture and use energy, and so on suggests that the underlying dynamic is highly adaptive, at least at first glance. What is increasingly clear, however, is that if this dynamic continues we stand a very good chance of killing ourselves along with a good portion of the rest of the planet. The latter is well under way—it's business as usual.

Biocentrism offers a direction for human society based upon a thoroughly fundamental transformation which stresses the centrality of finding our place *in* nature. Such a transformation is as fundamental as the neolithic or industrial revolutions.

A life-centered or planet-centered value system requires that we move toward transcending the split with nature both within our own psyches

and in our material relationships: how we consume and alter the biosphere. Far fewer humans, far lower levels of consumption for many, much improved levels for others, the recreation of authentic communities that reintegrate the human into the natural, and the abandonment of the instrumentalities of control—these are a few of the implications of such an ethic.

In contrast, a human-centered approach focuses on wiser if not greater human control. In its more progressive forms we hear words like stewardship rather than ownership; nevertheless, underlying both is the notion that we can replace nature with our intellect, that we can manage our way out of any problems, that we as a species are not only unique (as every species and ecosystem is), but that our uniqueness means we are godlike, better than the others. In short, it is the same arrogance, the same split that has brought us to the current crisis.

VALUES AND CULTURE

All systems of values are part of a broader cultural framework that mediates human behavior by shaping personality and thought. Culture organizes human experience and gives it meaning. Biocentric values are no exception—they are part of a larger cultural framework, albeit an emergent one. Part of that culture includes an understanding of the role of culture generally as well as the critique of particular cultures.

A biocentric approach presents human-centered cultures as both rooted in and perpetuating a split between our species and the rest of nature. This split, which is manifest as both a chronic and debilitating inner tension and as a stressful warlike antagonism toward the environment, is the source of our experience of estrangement. Disembodied, our cortex is a shadow of life, ever busy trying to rationalize the irrational while telling us it is all. Biocentrism offers us back our body by recognizing that the Earth is our real community—that by healing our split from it, by healing the split between cortex and heart, and by healing nature within, we can begin to heal all of nature. It also helps us to understand how that split is possible.

To point to the neolithic as the origin of the culture of control is not enough. A biocentric view places these events in context. It helps us understand how the capacity for culture and the resulting plasticity in human behavior, thought and emotion, and our ability to learn and pass on learning (attitudes and world views as well as technical or social information)

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enables us to divide ourselves. This capacity for culture allowed humans threatened with localized overpopulation in neolithic times to increase the human carrying capacity by altering both their behavior and the environment in substantial ways. With the new dynamic set in motion the fundamental injury to other needs, the split itself, was probably not very obvious. First, it was cumulative over a long time. Second, the very capacity for culture allowed them (and us) to deny the estrangement, even required such denial for both psychological and social reasons. Third, the emerging social dynamic of hierarchy distributed the costs and benefits of the new adaptive strategies unequally, favoring the decision makers and shapers of a society's values.

Culture has allowed us to trade our place in nature for larger human numbers spread over the entire planet, converting large amounts of the biosphere to our purposes so long as we are willing to pay the price of the various forms of domination and the accompanying anguish with which we are so familiar—and so long as we are willing to deny the value of other life and allow nature to pay the price. The plasticity with which evolution has endowed us allows us to create alienating and biocidal sociocultural systems, but it does not require it; it is not natural in the sense of being necessary or in the sense of being in tune with our deepest nature. (We should not forget that while cancer is a part of nature, it kills its host.) There are other cultural possibilities, including biocentric ones. Indeed, for most of the time humans have been around we have lived in communities which included the rest of nature. We can do so again, this time with full knowledge of what the alternatives are and their price. To limit our biocidal possibilities is not unnatural, as Callicott quite rightly argues, because cultural systems always limit behavior.²² Culture is always prescriptive.

The roots of biocentrism are deep and its emergence in modern form is a result of both the resilience of Earth wisdom and the current crisis—just as surely as human-centered values and cultural systems are a result of the crisis of the neolithic. Both Marxist and feminist anthropology have traced the roots of class and patriarchal domination and have contributed much to understanding the dynamic which emerged. Marx and some Marxists have rightly regarded the split with nature as a decisive milestone in human cultural evolution, albeit a positive one. Some feminist writing has addressed itself to the split with nature, both in the modern epoch and in the distant past, but usually as something ancillary to the development of hu-

man forms of domination. A biocentric understanding suggests that the culture of control over nature is part of an adaptation to scarcity and lays the groundwork for other forms of domination.²³

By accepting biocentric limits upon our behavior we directly undermine the split from nature and the resulting culture of domination which arises from it. In doing so we accept constraints on overconsumption and militarism that no human-centered system of values could impose. Domination and hierarchy, the attempt to control that gives rise to high levels of consumption and militarism, will be unshakable problems until we recognize we cannot substitute our intellect for nature. The degree to which we attempt to do so is a function of our own estrangement.

ALLIANCES

Guha gives us much to think about and we ignore his voice at our peril. Although the Earth and other species need wilderness, we will lose the battle for the planet if we do not realize, as Guha suggests, that imperialism and militarism are our enemies as well as anthropocentrism. We cannot dismiss the struggles over human social structure and realize a deep ecological vision. The land ethic is not compatible with most of the existing order of things. In struggling to alter that order it is necessary to understand how it works, for if we do not, the vision in the hearts of a few will not be enough.

NOTES

1. Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 71-83. [Included in this volume.]

2. Some critics, though not Guha, have accused deep ecology of being fundamentally misanthropic. No doubt there are genuine misanthropes about, but in my reading of the deep ecological literature, both scholarly and popular, I find criticism aimed at human behavior resulting from alienation and disease, not the species per se. Even the angriest statements of those struggling on the front lines against biocide can best be understood in this context. Humans have a place in nature; it is when they try to separate themselves that their behavior becomes destructive.

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3. Bahro, one of the leading German Green theorists, comes from a Marxist background, as do many other German Greens. *The Alternative* (London: New Left, 1978), his Marxist critique of "actually existing socialism," is a major contribution to understanding human society. It earned him a lengthy jail sentence in the GDR before he was allowed to emigrate. His later, Green writings are more widely read in the U.S. than his first book, but his historical perspective and concern with human society runs through all of his work, which is read by environmentalists. It is unfortunate, however, that U.S. Marxists are more familiar with his later work than deep ecologists are with his earlier work.

4. Human population pressure combined with human capacity for culture are probably the two most important factors in explaining the dynamic of social evolution and the subsequent alteration of the biosphere. This is discussed more fully below in the section "Values and Culture." In conjunction with this thesis, see note 17 and Mark N. Cohen, *Food Crisis in Prehistory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), and Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972).

5. We live in a world shaped by the European expansion. Most of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are still bound tightly into an international political economy and state system which keeps them subservient. The wealth continues to flow north. Most of the environmental degradation in the Third World can only be understood in this context. This is also the case with regard to many efforts at conservation, which are often at the expense of the poor. Attempts to break with this international system have sometimes been successful, as with the Russian and later revolutions; nevertheless, the results of such revolutions for the environment have not been impressive. Much more than Marx's nineteenth-century notion of progress (and in direct contradiction with many of his revolutionary goals), it has been the international political environment of hostility that has greeted these revolutionaries, combined, of course, with the inertia of hierarchy inherent in civilized societies, that has resulted in their systems following a very similar road of super-exploitation of the environment. Both capitalist and statist societies eat and despoil nature, notwithstanding different internal dynamics. There are similarities as well: increasing competition in weapons and higher levels of consumption. More recently there has been a recognition among revolutionaries and even some non-revolutionary governments that protection of the environment is an important value in and of itself and that industrialization and its products are not desirable goals. However, the costs of defending themselves from a hostile world (and the costs of giving in) lead to environmental degradation. Clearly solutions must be global and systemic.

6. Arne Naess has suggested in "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes" (Michael Tobias, ed., *Deep Ecology*, 2d ed. [San Marcos, Calif.: Avant Books, 1980], p. 270) that conflicts between humans and other species can be resolved by balancing the competing interests based upon how "near and vital" the interests are to the species involved. Given the large numbers of Homo sapiens and

their extensive settlement, it is difficult to see how this approach could lead to a redress of the current imbalance unless one takes a global perspective. There can be little question, for example, that humans need to give way to tigers, chimps, elephants, grizzlies, and other species. With five billion people and only a few thousand members of certain other species, restoring a balance can only mean a movement in one direction: more room for other species. Of course, the impact on humans of making room for other creatures will not affect all humans equally. Specific humans will have to make way. How are the costs to be spread? If one takes a strictly localized perspective, trying to balance the interests of a local human population only with the interests of a local nonhuman population, an assessment of competing interests gives a result less favorable to nonhuman life. Once one takes the extensive human presence as a given, human interests in their existing livelihood must be weighed without taking into account significant human numbers elsewhere. In this way, the pressure on already diminished populations of other species would continue.

7. Under what circumstances and in what situations humans can be treated as a species rather than as classes, genders, and ethnic groups or as individuals is a contentious matter among theoreticians and activists concerned with the environment and human justice. It is an important issue, and is best resolved in regard to specific questions. For some questions a species approach is appropriate; for others another level of aggregation is required. See note 21 below for a related discussion.

8. After submission of this manuscript Carolyn Marchant published a discussion paper, "Environmental Ethics and Political Conflict: A View from California," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 45–68, in which she distinguishes egocentric values from anthropocentric values. The dominant values in the U.S. and most other developed societies are most properly termed egocentric rather than anthropocentric.

9. Critical theory distinguishes between natural poverty, which is due to a lack of development of productive forces, and social poverty, which is the result of exploitation and inequality. Both are regarded as oppressive. It is fair to say that Marx saw the human/nature schism and subsequent struggle through eyes sensitized to the class struggle. Thus, there can be no essential harmony until the struggle is over, i.e., until the human species brings the rest of nature under its control.

10. In *Ecology as Politics* (Boston: South End, 1980), pp. 28–42, Andre Gorz has a very useful discussion on the social definition of poverty and its role in social management. On a psychological level, the existence of narcissistic tendencies (if not clinical narcissism) is important in explaining how individuals become susceptible to the social dynamic of consumption. When people are not aware of their real needs, they often seek socially defined and approved substitutes which necessarily cannot satiate them. Toys, drugs, and even television cannot effectively fill the emptiness left by the inability to experience intimacy, for example. The lack of a developed self leaves individuals particularly vulnerable to manipulation. Christopher

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Lasch examines this phenomenon in *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978). On the psychological aspects of the genesis of narcissism, see the various works of Alice Miller, James F. Masterson, Heinz Kohut, and Otto Kernberg. Alexander Lowen has provided a more popular treatment. The function of the family generally in shaping the malleable young for the roles society requires has long been the subject of some of the best psychological writing, including that of Wilhelm Reich, Erik Erikson, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, and others. The phenomenon is not new. Ruskin noted in the last century that the two objects of civilized life are: "Whatever we have—to get more; and wherever we are—to go somewhere else." The only thing we might add today is: to get there faster.

11. Bertell Ollman, *Alienation*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 14–32.

12. For Marx the labor process, by which humans transform nature to make their living, defines the human relationship to nature and is central to human biological and sociocultural evolution. This is linked not only to the conquest or appropriation of nature as central to our "species-being," but to an open-ended notion of human *material* needs. It is in this area that more modern anthropological critiques offer a deeper understanding of the circumstances of human evolution than nineteenth-century theorists had available. One notable point of difference involves the notion of communal ownership which Marx and Engels, following Morgan, viewed as a central feature of egalitarian society. This idea was important because it informed their vision of a future egalitarian society: communism. They believed that the failure of primitive egalitarian society was based upon scarcity; communism would be wealthy, taking advantage of previously developed forces of production. Modern anthropology suggests, nevertheless, that while primitive societies were egalitarian they did not have a sense of ownership, either private or communal. Animals, plants, and nature were part of a community. Much anthropological research also calls into question the notion that there is a deep-seated need in humans to fundamentally transform the environment.

13. Feminists have offered some of the most cogent criticism of power and hierarchy as such. The work of Susan Griffin, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Kathy E. Ferguson, Mary Daly, and others offers enormously valuable insights into the difference between power (over the other) and empowerment, the nonalienating experience of being a full member in a real community. If one extends the notion of community to include other species and the biosphere, one has, I believe, a version of biocentrism. See Judith Plant, ed., *Healing the Wounds* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989), for example.

14. Marjorie Spiegel, in *The Dreaded Comparison* (Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers, 1988), cogently compares the similarities in the arguments that attempt to justify exploitation and domination of and cruelty to humans, animals, and nature. The manner in which some humans separate themselves from other people and from the natural community invariably involves a process in which differences

(both real and imagined) are translated into value distinctions simply on the basis of difference. Thus, because Africans or women or wolves are different from Europeans, men, or humans, they are less valuable or of no value.

15. See, for example, Boris Kamarov, *Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union* (White Plains: M. E. Sharpe, 1980).

16. The literature on imperialism and the world that it has produced is enormous. A good general introduction is Charles K. Wilber, ed., *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1988) or L. S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift* (New York: Morrow, 1981). From there one may pursue more specialized works in economics, politics, conflict, and so on. For those concerned with the environment explicitly, the work of Alfred Crosby stands out; both *The Columbian Exchange* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1973) and *Ecological Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) are truly major contributions. Carolyn Merchant's excellent *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) describes the emergence of the scientific world view that formed an essential part of the cultural framework justifying the domination of other people, nature, and women.

17. The institutions and processes that constitute civilization are not matters for serious debate. The state, urbanization, extensive division of labor, class structure, patriarchy, militarism, and monumental architecture are among those elements identified by Elman Service, Robert M. Adams, K. C. Chang, Morton Fried, William Sanders, Barbara Price, and others. On the origins and evolution of the problems of agriculture see Wes Jackson, *Altars of Unhewn Stone* (San Francisco: North Point, 1987).

18. The earliest human communities include nature, but do distinguish the "other," namely, humans belonging to other societies or communities, especially those not involved in some reciprocal relationship. Conflict between communities certainly predates civilization and the neolithic period. Much of this conflict, however, was symbolic and sharply limited in its destructiveness to both persons and the environment. As some communities followed a path toward hierarchical social organization, the ability of the more hierarchical groups to displace, conquer, or otherwise make nonhierarchical groups dependent on them developed. Institutionalized relationships of domination became the order of the day. To escape domination other groups were forced to move, submit, or resist by adopting similar social strategies. The origins of center and periphery and the attendant exploitation, brutalization and conflict between center and periphery and competing centers are thus very old indeed. How egalitarian communities might relate non-competitively will be a critical issue for humans and others on this planet. Certainly understanding both the psychological dynamic that generates the notion of the "other" and the social/ecological dynamic that creates pressure toward conflict and hierarchical solutions goes a long way toward solving the problem, although it is not sufficient in itself.

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19. To say that civilization must somehow be fundamentally transcended is to say that the dynamic founded on and constituted by various relationships of domination must be overcome. It may represent a kind of return to the past, but in the service of the future. For the last six thousand years our species has behaved much like one might expect adolescents from a severely dysfunctional family to act. We must go back to where things went wrong—to the origins of our estrangement—and pick up from there. In doing so we make use of all that has occurred in the interim. We have already paid dearly for the lessons.

20. There are attempts within the Marxist tradition to break out of this approach, but they are limited in degree. For instance, Gorz has argued that socialist industrialization is as bad as capitalist industrialization if it results in the same kind of environmental damage. Nevertheless, in his attempt to integrate environmental constraints into a Marxist framework, he remains concerned with the fate of Homo sapiens, not with the biosphere as such. In the West it is painfully obvious that the Marxist concern with the environment is largely a response to the environmental movement, rather than something generated internally. It remains to be seen how both dialogue and praxis will develop. Recently a journal was founded in this area, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. The analysis of environmental policy in statist or state socialist countries demonstrates that their path reflects a dynamic based on maintaining a bureaucratic oligarchy at home and defending themselves from a hostile world capitalist order. This dynamic, while differing from what moves capitalist societies, offers little in the way of hope for a significant alternative relationship with the environment. Genuinely socialist or communitarian experiments in the Third and First Worlds that reject massive industrialization are another matter.

21. The degree of choice that individual humans and human collectives exercise is a matter of serious debate. Factors such as consciousness, social position of particular individuals and groups, and the limits of historical possibility certainly all play a role. In the course of social struggle people necessarily make certain assumptions: that it is possible to realize their goals, that they understand the operation of the social (or natural) world enough to bring about the desired results, and that those opposed to them must be held accountable for their resistance as if they understood what they were doing and recognized the choices available to them. The rather consistent failure in the social realm to realize expectations calls these assumptions into question to varying degrees. Some things, nevertheless, do seem clear: when people make decisions, it is the unintended consequences that tend to outweigh in importance the intended one—a point which is often never realized. No one set out to invent the state, but a series of decisions over time had that result. There have been "moments" in human history (and prehistory) when real choices about basic human social structure and interaction with nature were possible. At such moments it was possible to switch a train from one track to another. When these moments occur in the future, there must be an awareness that the tracks are

available and that awareness must be shared by enough people to make a difference. Most of the time choices are more constrained, with humans squabbling over who gets what seat on the train, rather than where its going. This is not to say, of course, that who sits where is not important to both humans and the rest of nature, for who sits where has much to do with the choices eventually taken when switching tracks is possible. On an individual level, both the powerful and the weak are socialized to roles that neither created, and they are limited in their options by structure and consciousness. Certainly those who benefit more seek to perpetuate and strengthen their position and this contributes to the perpetuation of the system. Even though those who benefit less are more inclined to resist their roles and seek change, they also cooperate in their subjugation because they have been socialized to do so and because they fear repression. The degree to which socialization limits possibilities varies with time and the conjunction of a number of factors. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind the often overlooked distinction between explaining behavior and excusing it. The former by no means implies the latter. Although people may not choose freely, their actions have consequences and accountability is fundamental to constraining both individuals and collectives. Without it there is no learning.

22. See J. Baird Callicott's discussion on the biosocial role of culture in *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 63–73. See also Dorothy Lee's *Freedom and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959).

23. See, for example, Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power & Male Dominance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).